



# Wyoming Department of Education

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## Special Programs Unit/Deaf-Blind Project

Services for the Visually Impaired

### Wyoming Awarded Distance Education Grant Opportunity

**Includes: Teachers for the Visually Impaired and Orientation & Mobility**

The difficulty of finding qualified special education personnel is not unique to Wyoming. According to studies sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, there continue to be persistent nationwide shortages of qualified special education teachers and service providers. Ninety-eight percent of the nation's school districts report special education teacher shortages, while the number of students with disabilities continues to grow at rates almost three times greater than the overall student population. In particular, studies indicate that the

United States has had a chronic and growing shortage of qualified teachers for students with visual impairments since the 1980s. (Dunlap, 2008)

To assist districts for the growing demand of qualified teachers for the Visually Impaired, Orientation and Mobility Specialists, Deaf-Blind Educators, and Teachers for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, WDE Deaf-Blind Project partnered with Texas Tech. University to provide an opportunity for local teachers, educators and therapists to attain a degree in the following fields:

- Teacher for the Visually Impaired
- Orientation & Mobility

Instructor

- Deaf-Blind Educator
- Teacher for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing

Wyoming has been granted 5 slots in each discipline—for two different sessions. Reserve your spot soon! For more detailed information contact Joanne Whitson,



[jwhits@educ.state.wy.us](mailto:jwhits@educ.state.wy.us) or toll free at 877.875.9467.

### Wyoming First Step Diagnostic Clinic

**October 17, 2008—Reserve your Spot Now!**

The Wyoming First Step Diagnostic Clinic is a transdisciplinary assessment for students in Wyoming — Birth through 21 years of age with any disability. The Clinic offers: assessment, intervention, research based best practices on the newest strategies and

recommendations, medical information and intervention. This information can be used to determine new goals for the IEP/IFSP, offer recommendations on existing goals, validate current programming and assist with the 3-year evaluation. For more information on the

Clinic go to [www.k12.wy.us/svi/index.html](http://www.k12.wy.us/svi/index.html) or contact Joanne Whitson,



### Wyoming Department of Education, Deaf-Blind Project

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#### Special points of Interest:

Literacy begins at birth—check out the article on "Shared Reading" This program allows ALL children a way to READ!

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## Fun Books for SHARED Reading

Patsy Pierce, Ph. D. The Center for Literacy and Disability Studies,  
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Shared reading is a technique that emphasizes conversation between a child and the reader about different aspects of the story. This powerful technique can account for at least 10% of the variance among reading and non-reading children (Ezell & Justice, 2005). Good shared reading supports children to ask and answer questions and to make comments about each page of a book. Effective shared reading also includes readers who can ask appropriate questions, wait for answers, and who make comments and connections regarding the story and the print on each page to meaningful words and events in the child's life (Ezell & Justice, 2005).

Shared reading is often difficult for children with disabilities due to the high level of language that is shared and expected during a conversation (Kaderavek & Sulzby, 1998).

Appropriate scaffolding techniques used by the communication partner along with augmentative and alternative means for the child to participate are required (Dale, Crain-Thoreson, Notari-Syverson, & Cole, 1996). Pierce and Erickson (2006) list several suggestions of appropriate interaction techniques (e.g., pausing, using gestures and pictures) to use with children with disabilities.

Interesting books may also facilitate longer engagement and enhanced

participation during shared reading with children with disabilities. Building on children's interests has been found to be an effective approach to enhance engagement and learning (Dunst, 2006). Children with disabilities may demonstrate typical topic-related interests (e.g., puppies, babies), but may also demonstrate less topic-related and more sensory-related interests (e.g., sounds, vibration, textures). Family members, teachers, and service providers may discover varying topic and/or sensory-related interests by observing children with disabilities in different settings and with different types of materials.



## Shared Reading Sensory Books: Increase Student Literacy Participation

Children were more likely to interact with books and participate during shared reading if we made books out of materials that reflected the children's sensory interests. We added text to the books related to the children, their friends, and their family interests. The following offers descriptions of how to make some of the books that we have found children with significant

disabilities to enjoy and explore during shared reading.

Several children with cognitive, motor, and sensory impairments with whom we have worked, seemed to enjoy squeezing "squishy" materials such as play-dough, putty, and even their diapers. We used this interest to make "squishy books" to give the children appropriate options to

explore their interests, to learn to turn pages, and to participate in shared reading. As children make comments, or adults could come up with simple phrases related to the pages in the book, these comments are written on "sticky notes" and attached to each page and used as text.

## Shared Reading: Directions to Make Squishy Books

### Ingredients:

- Several heavy-duty, freezer - quality, Ziploc bags (1 quart size)
- "Squishy" materials such as alcohol-free hair gel (variety of colors), hand-lotion (with and without glitter), "gak" ( water and corn starch with food coloring), vegetable oil and food coloring, sand, dirt, paper strips/packaging materials, etc.
- Small plastic letters, objects
- Clear packaging tape

### A sample squishy book



Fill a Ziploc bag (page) with something "squishy". Before closing the bag, add small objects like plastic animals and plastic letters that might spell the name of the animal into the bag. Zip it shut. After filling several bags, tape the zippered-parts together with packaging tape to make a book. Usually 3-4 pages can be securely taped together. Now you have a book that a student can enjoy while using a multitude of senses.

## Shared Reading—Variations on the theme: Other Types of Books

**Animal food books:** Pages filled with different types of animal foods, (e.g., dry dog food, dry cat food, bird seed, hay) and with the logo/label from the food container. You may have to use a sample-size of the animal food to have the right size of the label/logo to put in the baggie with the food.

**Breakfast food books:** Pages filled with different types of cereal along with the label/logo from the box of cereal. It is helpful to use "snack-size" boxes of cereal in order to have the right size label to put in each bag. White paper strips could also be added as "milk" for the cereal. We found that puncturing the bags with a needle in several places help the pages to remain flat.

**Sand books:** Pages filled with sand, seashells, sea-horses, and letters to spell these words. Children with visual

impairments often seemed to interact more with these books when glitter was mixed with the sand.

**Dirt books:** Pages filled with potting soil, plastic insects, worms, and letters to spell related words.

**ABC book:** Pages filled with a plastic letter and small objects starting with that letter, (e.g., B, bug, baby, ball). The pages also have a fun substance in them like hair gel.

**Name book:** Each page has a plastic letter and items that begin with that letter from a child's name, (e.g., P, pig, next page, A-ant, next page, T-tiger, next page, S -soap, last page, Y-yellow gel). All pages have different fun squishy stuff in them.

**Wallpaper/Fabric Sample Books**  
Wallpaper/Fabric Sample books are

made from old sample books by gluing objects, pictures, and text on each page. These books are heavy enough to remain stable for ease in page turning and hold up to much moisture and rough usage. The colors and textures are interesting to many children.



*Children enjoying wall paper and fabric sample books*

*Photo provided by Patsy Pierce*

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## Websites in the Spotlight



The National Braille Press has created a national children's Braille literacy program to encourage families with

blind children to read print/Braille books together.

The Read Books! Program is giving away bags containing: An age-appropriate

print/Braille book (birth- 7 years) in English or Spanish:

- ◆ A Braille primer for sighted parents
- ◆ A colorful print/Braille place mat
- ◆ Print/Braille bookmarks
- ◆ A guide for parents on why and how to read books with their young blind child

◆ A gift coupon redeemable for another print/Braille book or Braille/large print playing cards

◆ Print / Braille magnetic Letters  
To request your bag and learn more about the importance of emergent literacy in early childhood for children with vision impairments, visit their website:

## Learning Media Assessment & Functional Vision Assessments Offered by WDE

One of the first questions asked about a child's learning is what his/her primary reading medium will be. Teachers and parents may be uncertain as to whether a child should learn Braille, rely on large print, auditory modalities or use regular print for accessing reading material. The purpose of the Learning Media Assessment, LMA, is to determine the most effective medium for accessing instruction and teaching methods. A certified teacher of students with visual impairments completes this assessment. The LMA covers both

general learning media and literacy media. One of the first areas to be examined is the student's ability to use their vision. This can be determined through a Functional Vision Assessment, FVA. This is of special importance when programming for students with visual impairments. Successfully educating these students depends upon access to accurate, current information about each child's use of his/her vision. The FVA complements information available from an ophthalmologist or optometrist regarding medical diagnosis, care, prognosis, and health of the visual system.

In order to assist districts with performing these mandatory assessments, WDE will be piloting a Low Vision Assessment/ Functional Vision Assessment and learning Media Assessment as part of the Wyoming First Step Diagnostic Clinic. The first assessments will be held during the Spring Clinic. If you are interested, contact Joanne Whitson, 877-875-9467.

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**Finding Answers Together**

For more information on Shared  
Reading or literacy strategies—

April 23—25, 2009

Western Regional Early Inter-  
vention Conference! Watch the  
web for information,

[www.k12.wy.us/svi/index.html](http://www.k12.wy.us/svi/index.html)

**Wyoming Awarded the Deaf-Blind Grant  
2008—2013**

The mission of the Wyoming Deaf-Blind Project is to ensure that all students in Wyoming who are deaf-blind receive the appropriate support and tools enabling them to achieve both academic success to improve results in school and go on to become contributing members of their community. In order to meet this mission, the project foci is to better identify children birth through 21 years of age who are deaf-blind; provide a comprehensive array of technical assistance, information, training and support throughout Wyoming to families, support staff, educators, early interventionists, aids and therapists in activities that are supported by scientifically based research for working with children who are deaf-blind and engage in ongoing leadership and collaboration with state and national agencies. For more information on the grant contact Joanne Whitson, 877.875.9467.

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